Power, Communications, Irrigation, Flood Control etc. and recommended policy initiatives and programmes to bridge these gaps and rejuvenate local economy alongwith measures for institutional reforms, additional Resources Mobilisation and effecting public participation in development activities. Trie HLC also estimated total cost for providing BMS to the North Eastern States and indicative requirement of funds for infrastructure development in the Ninth Five-Year Plan.

Immediately after the submission of the Report of the HLC, action was initiated to operationalise its various recommendations by dovetailing them with the Plans of the concerned States and Central Ministries/Agencies. In addition, funds are also being made available through North Eastern Council (NEC) for infrastructure projects and from the Non-lapsable Central Pool of Resources constituted for assisting development projects, including in the infrastructure sector, in die North East and Sikkim. Project proposals relating, inter-alia, to the recommendations of the HLC are envisaged to be indentified from time to time, for assistance, on merits, from the Central Pool. During 1998-99, certain projects (including those recommended by the HLC) in the North East and Sikkim have been assisted. Amounts allocated for the various infrastructure sectors such as Irrigation and Flood Control, Energy, Transport and BMS for seven States in the North East during 1998-99 are as follows:

		(Rs. Crores) Allocation during 1998-99
1.	Basic Minimum Services (BMS)	1009.16
2.	Infrastructure	
	(a) Irrigation and Flood Control	361.27
	(b) Energy	645.10
	(c) Transport	606.65

Corruption in Passport Offices

*69. SHRI ABANI ROY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item captioned "Passport seekers at the mercy of touts" as reported in the *Hindustan Times* dated the 11th October, 1999;

(b) if so, whether Government are aware that rampant corruption is prevalent at various passport offices in the country;

(c) whether the passport officials, in connivance with touts, are looting the passport seekers; and

(d) if so, the steps taken by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) and (c) The Government is aware of the activities of touts who operate from outside the passport offices. The activities of touts have been brought to the attention of the local police from time to time and police action against them has been intensified. Investigations so far have not established any definite linkage between the touts and employees of the Passport Offices. However, vigilance has been strengthened at the Passport Offices and whenever any act of impropriety by any Passport official comes to the notice of the Government, appropriate action is taken against the earning official.

(d) The Government have taken several measures in the recent past to counter the illegal activities of touts and agents in the grant of passport services to the public. These include de-recognition of travel agents as an authorised channel for servicing passport applications, issue of passport application forms free of charge, augmentation in the number of passport offices and collection centres in the country, dispatch of passports directly to the addressees by post etc. Government is also making efforts to increase public awareness of the various facilities available at the Passport Offices so as to minimise the influence and activities of the touts.

Implementation of Crop Insurance Scheme at Block Level

†*70. SHRI RAMJI LAL: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the draft of the Crop Insurance Scheme together with the grounds on which this scheme has been implemented in various States;

(b) whether Government would implement Crop Insurance Scheme at the block level, particularly, for the small farmers; and

(c) if so, by when and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI NITISH KUMAR): (a) The National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (Rashtriya Krishi Bima Yojana) has been implemented from Rabi 1999-2000. The scheme covers all farmers (loanee and non-loanee), more crops, more risks and charges rationalised premium rates.

(b) and (c) The scheme provides for operation with the Gram Panchayat, as unit area, subject to the availability of past yield data. It is applicable to all farmers including the small and marginal farmers.

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†Original notice of the Question received in Hindi.